

Men Against Violence Against Women



* P.O.R.O. *

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MAVAW's Contribution To The International Day Against Violence To Women

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM)
MAXIMUM MALE OPPRESSION AND
HORRIFIC GIRL CHILD ABUSE.

HORRIFIC GIRL CHILD ABUSE.

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* To Whom It May Concern *

INTRODUCTION :

On Sat/16/Nov/96, at around 10pm, AVM Channel 4 TV, showed a movie, produced by a Canadian citizen, titled "A SCREAM FOR SILENCE". This film, in my view, should be seen by all men, since it graphically depicts, both by acting and real life sequences, the level of distress experienced by women and girls, caused by historically entrenched male domination, oppression and insecurity.

Although the segments of the film on the act of rape were horrifying, the segment on female genital mutilation (FGM) exposed the most destructive form of child abuse that existed and which still exists/occurs in various parts of the world.

Records show that FGM, practiced by many families who still...

Records show that FGM, practiced by immigrant families who still adhere to this cruel tradition, now start at 6 years of age, because girls who are growing up in different cultures are rejecting the practice. In most areas it started from 8 years until the onset of menstruation.

In the West doctors amputated clitorises and ovaries in the 19th Century, as a treatment for epilepsy, hysteria, lesbianism, masturbation, melancholia and nymphomania.

As recently as the 1950's, American and European doctors performed clitoridec-tomies to treat nymphomania and melancholia.

Having first read of FGM in the Sunday Express, page 3, 6/Nov/1994, and on four occasions thereafter, I was still very unprepared for the shock of actually viewing the mutilation of a young girl, shown in the film movie.

As a member of the Organisation, Men Against Violence Against Women,

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..... (MAVAW), I felt constrained to put my feelings on paper and share my information with the public through this medium. You may find the following graphic, but let me assure you, it falls far short of the effect of actually viewing the mutilation on a TV Screen.

WHAT IS FGM (Female Genital Mutilation)

FGM is the removal of part or all of the female genitalia. The procedure can simply be a small but painful nick across the hood of the clitoris, as is accepted by the Islamic community in Hargeisa, capital of Somaliland, in northwestern Somalia. However, more extreme forms of mutilation are common. The mildest form of excision in FGM is analogous to circumcision, the removal of the foreskin on the male genital, and entails the removal of the hood of the clitoris. The more severe form involves removal. The more

severe form, involves partial or total removal of the clitoris, the organ of sexual pleasure in women, and all or part of the labia minora. The most extreme form is called Infibulation, during which the clitoris, inner labia (minora) and most of the soft flesh of the labia majora, are cut off and scraped away respectively. The two sides of the vulva are then fastened with acacia thorns, catgut, silk or a glue made from a tree gum or eggs, and the girl then bound from waist to toes, immobilised for weeks, until the scar tissue nearly seals the vagina. Sometimes the girl bleeds to death and she is left just a pencil thin hole close to the anus for urination and menstruation. The crude stitches fashion a chastity belt of the girls own flesh, in order to make sexual intercourse impossible until she is married and her husband cuts or tears it open.

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Almost all Somali women are circumcised and 87% of them have undergone the most extreme form, -infibulation-

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that up to 120 million females alive today, in at least three dozen countries have been circumcised. UNICEF says most girls are between the ages of 4 and 10 when they undergo the rite.

Sudanese surgeon and women's activist Nahid Toubia reports that an estimated 85 to 114 million girls and women in the world are genitally mutilated.


According to a UN background paper in 1993, women are among the chief victims of violence. Female infanticide, sex-selected abortions and severe neglect, have effectively reduced the number of women in South Asia, North Africa, the Middle East and China by 100 million. Said paper also noted that in 2,000 worldwides in ...

in 2,000 worldwide is reported to have been raped, one third of wives in developing countries are estimated to be battered and at least 90% of violence in the home^{is} against women and children.

However, infibulation is no guarantee of virginity. At the Hargeisa orphanage, 40 of the 110 children were abandoned by their unwed, circumcised mothers, who were cut or torn open, willingly or unwillingly, by the men who impregnated them.

WHEN DID FGM BEGIN

No one knows exactly when or how the practice began, though scholars speculate it originated along the Nile Valley. The earliest literary references, dating from 2000 BC, indicate that ancient Egyptians, Jews and others performed the surgery. Some scholars believe nomads invented infibulation, cutting and sewing closed the vaginal opening —

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to keep women herders monogamous and to protect them from rape. Others have suggested it may be a form of primitive population control, perhaps imposed by slave owners who did not want their women unable to work.

WHERE IS FGM PRACTICED

Earlier reference in the the Introduction was made by the practice in the 19th Century by Western doctors and in the 20th Century by American and European doctors.

Although female circumcision is not prescribed in the Koran, it is most commonly practiced by Muslims. Yet the practice does not exist in Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest places of the Islamic world, or in many other Muslim countries, including Algeria, Iraq, Syria and Tunisia.

In an interview in Hargeisa, a prominent Islamic leader, Ibrahim Ahmed Hussein said "There is no evidence that the Prophet M.I."

... ..
"There is no evidence, that the Prophet Mohammed ordered the circumcision of his own daughters."
"For women, it is sufficient to just make a very small cut in the hood of the clitoris. Cutting and sewing is nothing to do with Islam."

FGM is the revered rite of passage in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Immigrants are taking the practice with them to Europe, Australia, Canada and more recently America. Ejua Oakenoo, founder of the African women's group FORWARD in London, says that despite a 1985 law banning the practice, thousands of girls who live in Britain are still mutilated each year, by unscrupulous, British doctors or through being sent by their families somewhere where it is not illegal such as France.

Egyptians need a licence to carry out the

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... operation and Sudan is the only African country to ban the extreme form of the practice, infibulation.

WHY IS FGM ACCEPTED

FGM has been continuing for centuries and women are conditioned to accept it. - if they don't they will be rejected by the community and not get a husband. In many parts of rural Africa, women are told that their clitoris will threaten the health of a newborn child, reduce fertility, secrete foul smelling fluids and grow so long that it will touch their thighs. Some even believe that a woman's external genitals are unattractive so it is better to remove them in order to be more beautiful.

Linked to chastity and fidelity in many African and Middle Eastern Cultures, FGM has been justified as a means to keep women docile and hard working. Feminists contend it also effectively removes

Feminists contend it also effectively removes pressure on men to please women sexually and is the best way to curb a woman's sexual pleasure and jealously guard her chastity.

In practising countries, women who are not circumcised are considered less desirable or even prostitutes. Often a virgin brings a higher bride price or dowry. The greatest insult in Somalia is "son of an uncircumcised mother".

The most frequent reason offered for female circumcision, is to stifle a girl's desire for sexual intercourse and to make penetration impossible, preserving her chastity. These cultures believe that the only value of a girl is her virginity. The main thing is to protect the girl from losing self control and from men until she is ready to be married.

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Because marriage is an economic necessity in countries where it is prevalent, FGM is "seen as an act of love rather than one of cruelty" said Dr. Mohammed Haddi, an obstetrician and gynecologist in Hargeisa, Somalia.

Ejua Dorkenoo, the WHO's expert on FGM, based in Geneva, said genital mutilation is closely linked with poverty, illiteracy and low status of women. Among its strongest proponents are the midwives and barbers who perform the act with a razor a scissors or shard of glass. Some charge 5,000 shillings (US 3.00) a girl, others as much as 92,000 shillings (US 55.00).

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF FGM

At best it destroys a woman's ability to experience sexual pleasure. At worst, it means she cannot have intercourse without pain, or menstruate or even urinate comfortably.

... worst, it means she cannot have intercourse without pain, or menstruate or even urinate properly. If she does manage to get pregnant, she has to be literally cut open to give birth.

When in Somalia, a girl child is infibulated, she is fed only sticky white rice to keep her stool soft and is allowed just one cup of tea a day. She has yet to feel the pain of passing urine, which will burn like fire until the wounds heal. When her legs are unbound in up to 40 days, her childish gait will have become a shuffle. It may take her a quarter of an hour to urinate, drop by drop. And she may have a kidney or bladder infection. When her menstrual periods start, they will last ten days (10) and she will be incapacitated by cramps nearly half the month — 17

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... caused by the near impossibility of flow passing through so tiny an opening. The odour of soured blood will linger. If the wounds heal improperly, shiny keloid scars will criss cross the otherwise soft tissue of the vulva. Child birth will be difficult and the thick scars may have to be cut through to the rectum. Women who deliver end up ripped to pieces said one obstetrician. The risk of maternal death is doubled by FGM and the risk of still birth increases several fold, the World Health Organisation says. If the labour is long and difficult, the pressure of the foetus's head may cause fistulas, abnormal openings. Unless the damage is repaired, urine and faeces may leak into the vagina, then seep uncontrollably down a woman's legs. Many women are unaware that their long term health problems result from FGM.

problems result from ^{short} their long term health FGM.

WHO IS TRYING TO STOP FGM


In Nov/1994 a draft decree was published in Nigeria, which made female circumcision (FGM) punishable by a seven (7) year jail term.

London banned the practice in 1985.

Sudan banned the extreme form of infibulation.

Sweden is the only Western country with laws to prosecute parents who have sent their daughters abroad to be circumcised.

Women's groups in Egypt have taken the Health Minister to court for allowing doctors in government hospitals to perform female circumcisions (FGM) and the

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Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights has launched a national campaign to combat the practice.

In 1993 the United Nations adopted the Declaration on Violence Against Women and a year later, appointed a special rapporteur to monitor such abuse.

Canada accept FGM as a reason to grant asylum in 1993 and this year passed a bill banning the practice by immigrants who adhere to FGM as a rite of passage for their girl children.


The United States has so far granted three (3) women asylum on this ground, but has addressed the matter on a case by case basis, without a formal change of policy.

... with a
major change of policy.

The self-declared independent Republic of
Somaliland in Northwestern Somalia, and its
government, with the support of UNICEF is trying
to eradicate female circumcision by 2000.

Sources:

- 1 Sunday Express 6/Nov/1994 - Pg 3 - Lagos AFP
- 2 Wednesday Newday 22/Mar/1995 - Pg 15 - Reuter
- 3 Wednesday Newday 24/May/1995 - Pg 8 - Reuter
- 4 Monday Newday 29/April/1996 - Pg 22 - Reuter
- 5 Monday Guardian 15/July/1996 - Pg 18 - AP.

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